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SERMON CCLXI.

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SUBMISSION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY.

1ST PET. ii. 13-17.—*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

The duty here inculcated is that of SUBMISSION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY. We shall notice,

I. THE GROUND ON WHICH THE SCRIPTURES REST THE OBLIGATION TO OBEDIENCE.

II. INQUIRE TO WHAT EXTENT OBEDIENCE IS REQUIRED.

1. *The ground on which the scriptures rest the obligation to obedience.*

Why must I obey the laws of the land? "Because," say some, "in entering into society, you promised to yield to the conditions of that society." The people are supposed to have assembled; to have yielded, each, a portion of his natural rights; to have established some form of polity, under which the government assumed certain responsibilities, and the people promised, to a certain extent, obedience.

By others this theory has been rejected as inadequate and unsound. There never was such a compact. A fiction conveys no rights and imposes no obligation. If there had been such a compact, it might be just as difficult to tell why the individuals who made it were

obliged to keep their engagements, as to answer the original question. Suppose a hundred men had stood out against the compact, and reserved all their original rights; are they under no obligation to forbear such acts as by the laws of the newly, formed community are prohibited, as theft, robbery, arson, and murder? Can we suppose that men coming together from a state of nature, with all their original rights, are competent to form a scheme of polity under which such acts shall be declared lawful and right? Has the community, in fine, a right to come together, and, (even if unanimous,) to dissolve all obligations, annul all law, and declare it right for every one to do whatever suits his pleasure? Is there no *obligation*, back of all this voluntary compact, which conscience acknowledges, which no mind can ever shake off, and from which no agreement among men can absolve the soul?

We need not have gone so far to show the absurdity of this theory of compact. When we inquire after the obligation to *abide* by the supposed compact, it is perceived at once, that the *obligation* is shifted back to remoter ground.

The question remains: "Why am I obliged to yield obedience to the laws of the land?" "Because," answers another, "you will be punished if you do not." Am I then a brute, without reason, without honor, without conscience? If I can hope to rob or murder with *impunity*, may I as well do it as let it alone? If I can successfully evade or resist the penalty of the law, am I guiltless in disobeying it? Is there no *right* or *wrong* about it, save only the consideration of punishment? I am inquiring after that *right to punish*, and that *obligation to obey*, which makes the failure to obey *guilt*,—such as should distress my conscience and cover me with shame. If a foreign tyrant overruns our country, plunders, devastates, butchers, lays our altars, firesides and laws in ruins, there comes no shame or remorse to the noble band who stand in the breach and jeopard their lives in defence of their homes and their country. *Why not?* If they are overcome, and perish on the scaffold, they perish without shame and without remorse. *Why so?* It is not enough to bind *conscience* under an obligation of obedience, to show her that punishment will be the consequence of disobedience. She does not acknowledge the maxim that might gives right, and that weakness imposes obligation. Compulsion and obligation are different terms in her vocabulary.

On what, then, rests the obligation to civil authority? On the ground that it is THE WILL OF GOD. Here is authority to which reason bows, and conscience submits. If that be a first principle,

which the soul feels instinctively ; for which she requires no proof and no instruction, and which she cannot shake off if she would ; then this is a first principle ; **TO OBEY GOD IS RIGHT ; TO DISOBEY GOD IS WRONG** ; and that because he is God ; and his will, the will of **PERFECT WISDOM** and **PERFECT GOODNESS**. Conscience so decides, and cannot decide otherwise.

That God *wills* the establishment and maintenance of civil authority, we might gather from the light of nature, and from the lessons of experience ; but argument is unnecessary. God has declared it in his word. “The powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” “Wherefore, ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.” “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord’s sake ; for so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

The importance of the question concerning the *obligation* to obedience is this :—other grounds of obligation are fictitious and atheistic ; they take no hold upon the conscience ; they are created by a breath, and by a breath are they destroyed. They are no foundations on which to rest a nation’s virtue and a nation’s peace ; they are utterly powerless in time of need. This *binds the conscience*. This takes hold upon the *soul* and its *eternal destinies*. You are bound, not simply because you have promised ; whether you have promised or not, you are bound. You are under obligation, not simply because you will meet with civil pains and penalties if you disobey. God will punish you, if you shuffle yourself away from the vengeance of civil authority ; and when you have suffered the penalty which human laws inflict, you have a still more dreadful account to answer at the bar of God.

You perceive, here, into what a dreadful error those fall, who contrive to do the very thing which the laws prohibit, while they do it in such a way that, owing to the technicalities of law, they cannot be punished. They may keep out of the reach of the civil power, but they fall into the hands of the living God ; and that under the double guilt of disobedience and fraud. Many a villain has rejoiced in the success of such an evasion of law, while, in evading the law, he has brought upon his soul the damnation of hell. Of this nature are all those villainous contrivances for evading the laws concerning the sale of intoxicating drinks ; evasions to which, it should seem, none but the most abandoned of the vile could ever descend. Of this nature are those evasions of the laws concerning usury. Many seem

to think that there is no *guilt* in doing these things ; and that they *may* do them provided they are willing to risk the penalty. But if human laws sleep, the law of God does not. These gains are, like the gains of Judas, the wages of iniquity. If not the price of blood, they are the barter taken for integrity, for duty to the law, and for the salvation of the soul. This is what they gain, who deal in arts of evasion and shuffling with law. It is no game of chance : win or lose ; no matter what the immediate issue,—only try the game and you forfeit your soul.

But if evasions of law are so dangerous, what shall be said of the open and palpable disregard to law which is sometimes witnessed ? What shall be said of the wanton disregard of such laws as those made for the defence of suffering humanity, and for the protection of the virtue and the peace of the community—by prohibiting, save under certain regulations, the traffic in intoxicating drinks ? Magistrates, upon whose souls rests the oath of God, may be unfaithful to their trust ; jurors may trample on their oaths ; the community may wickedly endure the wrong ; but all together will be confronted with the widow and the fatherless at the bar of God ; and how think ye this unfaithfulness to the authority of law will fare at that tribunal ? If “the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it,” against him that “coveteth an evil covetousness” to his house, by thriving on the gains of an unlawful and murderous traffic ; how will the voice of the betrayed law, and the voice of violated oaths, mingle with the cries of widows and orphans against the unfaithful magistrates who bear the sword in vain, and against the community that silently tolerate the wrong ? Will there be no account in the judgment for such things as these ?

Having shown the foundation upon which the scriptures rest the obligation of obedience, we inquire,

2. *To what extent obedience is due.* “Without limit,” say some ; and back up their declaration by repeating the passages : “submit yourselves to *every* ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake : whoso resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” This doctrine goes against all resistance to arbitrary power ; against all non-conformity to civil or religious establishments ; it annihilates all constitutional rights, and gives the world over to hopeless despotism.

As our Puritan fathers resisted such claims, as our fathers of the Revolution rebelled against them, and as the people of these United States deem such sentiments subversive of all political and religious freedom, it becomes a matter of interest for us to inquire whether for

all this we are liable to be condemned at the bar of God. Are we, and were all our fathers wrong on this fundamental principle?

What is the *design* of these scriptures, which enjoin obedience to civil authority. Is it to enjoin submission in general, or do they speak especially of the *extent* of a submission whose obligation in general is not doubted? The questions are entirely distinct:—Is *submission* a duty?—Is *unlimited* submission a duty? If a child inquires, “Must I obey my father?” I answer, yes; and repeat the authority—“Children, obey your parents in all things.” He goes away, and the next news I hear is, that his abandoned father has ordered him to commit murder, and he has obeyed. I talk with him, and try to show him the enormity of his guilt. He replies, Sir, you taught me that it was my duty to obey my father, and I have but obeyed the word of God, which requires me to obey my father “in all things.” These are the words of scripture; they teach the duty of *filial obedience*; but they do not teach an *unlimited* obedience, to the destruction of the authority of the great moral law of God. It is altogether a perversion of these words of scripture, to allege them in justification of the crime of murder. So in the present instance, if the design of the scripture is to teach the duty of *obedience*, it by no means follows, of course, that they teach *unlimited* obedience.

The passages to which we have referred, are evidently treating of the duty of *submission* in general; they are not agitating the question of *unlimited* submission.

We have numerous approved examples to the contrary of such a doctrine. The rulers, elders and scribes, with the high-priest, once commanded the apostles not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. The apostles took no exception to the authority of the tribunal, as not being the proper body to take cognizance of proper matters; they would have yielded to no authority. They simply answered, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” They disobeyed the mandate.

When Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to fall down and worship the golden image, they replied: “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter:—Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” God delivered them from the fiery furnace, and justified their disobedience.

Daniel chose to be cast into the lions’ den, rather than yield obedience to a command that put it at his option either to give up his re-

ligion or lose his life. God justified his disobedience, and delivered him.

When Jeroboam set up priests "for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made," most of the ten tribes submitted to his new institutions, and God punished them for yielding obedience, because they "left all the commandments of the Lord their God," in obeying this ordinance of man.

For disobedience to human laws, when human laws conflict with the laws of God, it is a sufficient justification to say, as Peter did when called to an account by the Jewish Sanhedrim, "We ought to obey God rather than man." The Bible is no instrument of tyranny. The firmest, boldest, most enlightened champions of freedom, have been such as submitted their consciences to the word of God. But while the Bible is the best friend to liberty, it is also the best friend to law, and the surest support of civil authority. A consistent Christian can never be a turbulent citizen. A Christian community will always be a community of order and law. If Christian missionaries follow the instructions and the examples of Apostles, they will never encourage their converts to attempt a subversion of the government under which they live. If they go to the Sandwich Islands, to Persia, to Turkey, or Siam, they will never make a direct assault upon the civil institutions of the land, however absurd and despotic they may be. Christianity will break the yoke of thralldom, but it acts upon civil institutions only as an alterative, by a silent, gradual, irresistible impulse. Upon the individual soul, the gospel is like a fire and a hammer; political and civil improvements are fruits which it does not attempt to gather before they are ripe.

But if the scriptures furnish instances of approved resistance to human authority, let it be remembered that these were cases where human authority came into direct conflict with the rights of conscience and with the law of God. The warrant of disobedience should be of a nature like this, and undeniably plain. We must be able to plead that we could not yield obedience, without rebellion against obligations of higher and paramount authority. In such a land as this, where those who make laws are to share in their operation; where those who make, and those who execute the laws, are soon to return to the common level, and are at any moment liable to impeachment and removal; where there is an independent judiciary ready to step in between the humblest citizen and the exercise of arbitrary power, or the operation of unconstitutional law; where no man is condemned without a trial by a jury of his countrymen, or

without the aid of learned counsel to secure him whatever advantage there may be in any, the least, irregularity in the prosecution ;—what plea in the wide world can be brought to justify disobedience to law, or the withholding of the deference due to the proper authorities ? If they who “ resisted the power,” under the despotism of Nero, “ resisted the ordinance of God, and should receive to themselves damnation,” what vengeance will God visit upon him who is a contemner of law under such a government as this ?

In conclusion, it is proper briefly to advert to a few things incompatible with the spirit of these instructions.

1. All captious railing at the properly constituted authorities is inconsistent with these commands, if not indeed directly prohibited. “ *Honor all men : Honor the king ;*” or, by implication, treat all in authority with the respect due to their office. “ Render to all their dues : Honor to whom honor.” A Christian citizen should always be pleased with the management of the powers that be, where it is possible to be so, and be true to the constitution and the best interests of the country. Captious fault-finding is not only prohibited by the scripture under consideration ; it defeats its own end. The boy in the fable who was always crying out, “ The wolf,” “ The wolf,” was not believed when the wolf came in earnest. So captious fault-finding defeats its own end, and renders it the more difficult to correct the evil when evil really exists.

2. This injunction of holy writ is scandalously disobeyed in those *caricatures* with which reckless partisans on either side assail the leaders of the opposite party, and especially the magistrates of the land. Oh what monuments of a nation’s shame ! What marks of loose morality, of corrupt taste, and of low scurrility, are those dishonorable prints that appear so often in the windows of the shops, and attach themselves so prominently to the walls of places of public resort ! What a shame to a community it is, that self-respect and good taste--not to say respectable morality--do not thunder out in a voice that will not be disobeyed, take these things hence ; let not the purveyors of politics and amusements cater for us as though we were a nation of blackguards.

Finally, nothing can be more directly incompatible with the spirit of these injunctions, than that usurpation of the functions of civil authority, which has so often been witnessed in our country in these days of excitement. The thief, the highwayman, the assassin, may plunder property and destroy life. But they do not strike at the foundations of all order and all law. They who take it upon themselves to administer what has been termed “ Lynch law,” are destroy-

ing the very foundations of all security for property or life. No other acts are so deadly to civil liberty. All history shows, that a few short months of such misrule are enough to make a people tired of a government of law in form, but of the despotism of the mob in fact. The only remedy ever found, when such disorders could not be repressed, has been to hand over the liberties of the people into the keeping of a master. Anarchy is always, and of necessity, followed by despotism. If there be any crime that deserves to be punished with death, for the mischief which it works, it is the crime of usurping the prerogative of law ;—joining with the mob, in the assumption of all the powers of lawgiver, judge, jury, accuser, witnesses, executioner. There is no greater foe to his country or to man, than the one who joins in a mob or abets it :—save perhaps the perjured magistrate who forbears to do his utmost to put it down. No matter what the cause ; no matter how odious the conduct of them against whom the popular tumult is stirred ; such things *must* cease, or we need no other judgments of God to bring us to speedy ruin.

Now, our duties in all these matters, are matters of religious concern. God requires them. If we fail in these, he will bring us to account in the day of judgment. It may be that some among us have thought this field of civil duties exempt from the supervision of the law of God. If so, oh fatal mistake ! Let us see to it that we have, in this department of duty, no accounts with God left unsettled till the judgment ; for “God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

SERMON CCLXII.

BY REV. EDWIN HALL,

TRUE FREEDOM.

JOHN viii. 36.—*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

THERE are those, who imagine that the religion of Christ is made up of little else than unwelcome and onerous restraints. “*The truth shall make you free?*” They think, rather, that if Christianity be

truth, it will bind them, and fetter them, and make this pleasant earth in the pleasant light of the sun henceforth a gloomy prison. If, for fear of worse evils, they think of turning to Christ before they die, they think of it as *putting off* their liberty, and taking up a yoke, which, for its own sake, they would never choose to bear.

The Lord Jesus Christ, however, declares that his "yoke is easy" and his "burden is light." He declares that if we "know the truth, the truth shall make us free;" and that "if the Son shall make us free, we shall be free indeed."

He does not mean that he has no laws. He has laws, which are to be obeyed under the most dreadful of all penalties. He does not mean that his yoke is easy and his burden light, because he requires little and gives large indulgences. He requires much. He gives not the least indulgence to the least transgression of any one of all his commandments. He requires *perfect* obedience.

The wonder with many is, how men can come fully under this holy government of Christ, and yet be *free*.

The wonder is, how those who are completely subdued to this authority are said to be "*called unto liberty*;" and to be brought into the "*glorious liberty* of the children of God."

Now, how is this? Why are not our "*Free-thinkers*," as they vaunt themselves, the true freemen? Why are not the men who scoff at all religion, the truly free; and, what they claim to be, the best *friends of liberty*, having, of all things, the greatest horror of religious restraints, lest they should in time grow into a coalition of church and state, or into something else equally destructive of freedom?

In order to arrive at just views concerning these matters, we will

I. INQUIRE INTO THE PROPER IDEA OF LIBERTY; and

II. SHOW THAT THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST MAKETH
FREE IS TRUE FREEDOM.

1. *The proper idea of liberty.*

I once heard an aged man, who had kept a dram-shop unlawfully, inveigh with great bitterness against the law that punished him, and against the men who were instrumental in bringing him to justice. "*I fought for liberty*," exclaimed he; "*I have a right to do what I please.*" "*This is a free country.*"

The notion appears to be becoming quite common, that, in a free country, every man ought to be allowed to do just what he pleases; and that just so far as this license is curtailed, freedom is taken away. Many seem to think there is no freedom unless men can be free from all *obligation*, human or divine.

It is to be granted, that every man ought to be allowed to do what

he pleases, provided he pleases *not* to do what is wrong in itself, or what injures his neighbor or the community. From doing what is in itself a moral wrong the laws of God ought to prohibit him; from working mischief to his neighbor, to society, or to the state, the laws of man ought to restrain him. These laws should be armed with penalties sufficient to coerce the lawless and the disobedient. *This is freedom. Without this there is no freedom.*

If a company are on ship-board in the middle of the ocean, I suppose no one would be allowed to blow up the ship, or sink it, under the notion of having a right to do what he pleases. No one of that ship's company would think his freedom infringed upon, if debarred from setting the ship on fire; or from throwing the provisions overboard; or from drenching them with sea-water; or from maiming his ship mates, or throwing them overboard; or from furnishing strong drink to those who manage the ship, and who are known to be grossly addicted to intoxication. A man complain that his liberty is infringed upon, because he is debarred from doing these things! No. If he has a particle of common sense he will see that his liberty consists in these laws, which do not so much restrain him as *defend* him, and secure to him *freedom* to preserve his life, and to use it in the pursuit of happiness. It would be proper for that ship's company to make additional laws concerning their general policy:—for example,—that none should use fire carelessly; that in a savage port none should leave the ship, or engage in traffic, save under certain regulations; and these regulations do but enlarge and secure freedom, provided they are wise and good. None but a villain could desire a liberty to do the things which such regulations forbid. To none other would they be any restraint. “*The law is not made for a righteous man.*” It is no restraint or embarrassment to him. The law is made “*for the lawless and disobedient.*” If any number should be disposed to do what such regulations forbid, then *law is needed*; and *its arm should be strong.* If there may be no law; or, if the law may not be enforced, then there is no longer liberty, nor is life itself desirable. That fated ship would be but a floating hell; and the sooner some explosion rends it to atoms, or some conflagration consumes it, or some tempest hurls it to the bottom of the ocean, the greater the mercy to its wretched inhabitants. There is no liberty—there is no living without law.

Every community is in the condition of that ship upon the ocean; save only that, in a community upon land, there is no tornado, nor conflagration to prove the last refuge from anarchy. There is no deep to open her mouth in mercy and put an end at once to the

community and its miseries. Here law is doubly important; and if there may not be law, there must be despotism or lingering ruin. If any sober man were to form a plan of a community, ordered under the fullest regard to liberty, he would not allow treason, or murder, or theft, or perjury, or arson, or kidnapping, or forgery. Why not? If he has *fought for liberty*, and means to be *free*, why not allow people to do as they please in such matters? It would destroy freedom. Allow every man to do as he pleases in the simple matter of punishing those who injure or insult him, as he thinks they deserve, and there is no freedom. No one has any longer any liberty to speak his opinion, or to utter or publish most wholesome and necessary truths. No one can be safe in pursuing his own righteous business, or in seeking his own happiness. *The absence of law destroys his freedom. Law gives him his rights; law secures them. Law gives him his liberty; law secures it. He has no rights, he has no liberty, without law.* Let reason answer, whether he who demands the liberty of doing what he pleases, without the restraints of law, is a friend of liberty.

The old man, who had "fought for liberty," did not consider how the law which forbade him to keep a tippling house, defended him and the rest of the community from pauper taxes, and from the mischiefs of a general licentiousness. He did not consider to how many families such a law was even more necessary than one to protect them from violence or murder. He did not consider, that, but for such a law, there might soon be *no* liberty; that a corrupt people might soon sell him and his children, and his whole country into the hands of despots:—or worse, that general licentiousness and depravation of principle would take away the liberty of travelling the high ways in safety; of working in the fields in security; or even of lying down in bed at night without the danger of being murdered and burnt-up before morning. The old man had "fought for liberty," and surely, had he thought a little further, his patriot soul would have been ready to enter the field once more, to contend for the *liberty of law*. Sure, he would not have taken part with the enemies of his country in the revolution, and why should he now?

The people of this country, for the very purpose of *enlarging* and *enjoying* their liberties, have framed for themselves laws. We have laws against blasphemy and profane swearing; laws against printing or distributing obscene books;—against purchasing them, or introducing them into schools or families; laws against lewdness; laws against lotteries, or selling lottery tickets; laws against horse-racing, or abetting the same; laws against gaming; against selling

playing cards, or having them in possession for sale ; laws against taverners keeping any implements used in gaming : laws against making or using any circus of any description ; laws against mountebanks and tumblers, and against suffering such persons to exhibit their tricks in our houses ;—in fine, the people of this land have found it indispensable to the possession and enjoyment of liberty, to have regulations of law on all subjects touching wrongs against *persons* or their *property* ; on all subjects touching the public *policy* or the public *morals*. Who is it that pleads that all these laws should be swept away, under the notion of enlarging our liberties ? What honest man and good citizen, feels his liberties infringed upon by these laws ? Who but villains want a liberty to do the things which these laws forbid ?

The principle illustrated by these views, is this :—that wise and necessary laws are not inconsistent with liberty, but essential to it : that liberty to do in a community, what every one may please to do, without any restraint of law, is an absurdity ; that both righteousness and mercy demand that wise and just laws be armed with penalties amply sufficient to coerce the wicked. Such a government of law is the only perfect, and the only possible freedom.

The same holds true, in relation to the government of God. Admit that his laws are “ holy and just and good,” and they are not only not incompatible with *perfect* freedom, but essential to it. No righteous and benevolent being will desire to do what these laws forbid. To righteous and benevolent beings, therefore, they are no restraint or incumbrance. If any desire to indulge in unrighteousness and malevolence, then laws are indispensable, and must be maintained by adequate penalties, if the great Jehovah is just and good. The highest offence in any community, is that which strikes at the foundations of government. If God, therefore, were to tolerate *impiety* towards himself, this would be to tolerate contempt and disloyalty towards the Supreme Ruler and his whole authority. And if these “ Foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do ? ” There is no power beyond His throne ; there is no future existence beyond the life to come, to which the groaning world may look for relief. Offences against our neighbor may be heinous, but as offences against our neighbor, they are only partial and limited wrongs. Their damning guilt, is their relation to the law and the authority of God. As *SIN*, they strike at the foundation of all government and all happiness. In this light, simple *impiety* rises into an evil which nothing less than infinite can measure. *SIN*, the offence *against God* ; is the deepest guilt that can darken the character of

man ; the most heinous wrong which the universe knows. It is with infinite reason that the "First and the great commandment" requires *piety to God* ; and that, in the eye of the divine law, no virtue, no goodness, nothing but entire and damning corruption is attributed to beings destitute of piety to God. Nor does it appear that the perdition to which divine justice dooms the incorrigibly wicked, is at all worse, even for the wicked themselves, than it would be to sweep away the divine laws ; or, which is the same thing, to sweep away their awful sanctions.

And these laws are "holy, just, and good." No upright, pure-minded being can possibly feel that they infringe upon his liberty. They forbid nothing in which he desires to be allowed ; they require nothing from which he would desire to be excused.

Does any one of you think it essential to his freedom, that he be allowed to lie, to deceive, and to defraud ? Does your idea of liberty involve a notion that you ought to be allowed to be revengeful and malicious, a slanderer, a thief, or a murderer? Does your notion of liberty demand a freedom to contemn God ? to blaspheme his holy name ? to scoff at his authority, to set at nought his laws ? Is your heart so disposed, that you feel your liberty infringed upon by the prohibition of such things ? Would you *use* the liberty, if the prohibition were removed ? Have you *no* love, *no* virtue, does nothing but the terror of Hell deter you from the perpetration of such wrongs ? Would you feel freer and happier, if such things were tolerated in the government of God ? Who wants a liberty to hate the truth, to hate righteousness, and to be impious ? Who is it that finds it essential to his happiness, to have such a license permanent and universal ? Miserable man ! Is there nothing that can give full loose to the feelings of your heart, but to hate, and to destroy all righteousness ; to destroy the laws, and overturn the very throne of God ? Is this your freedom ! Is this your good ? It is even so, "*The carnal mind is enmity against God.*" Wonder not that there are laws ! Wonder not that there is a hell !

And what do our "*Free-thinkers*" want ? The liberty of thinking that falsehood is truth, and truth is falsehood—that truths proved by demonstration are doubtful, if they threaten evil to evil-doers ? Do they want a freedom to think that two and two are not four ; that there are no seas nor mountains upon the earth ; that the worlds do not move ; that in the machinery of the heavens, and in the beauties of the earth there are no tokens of the knowledge and power, and skill, and taste, and goodness of the Creator ? freedom to think that

there is no right, there is no wrong, there is no truth, no error, no reason, in the universe?

For my part, I know not what *free thinking* is, save to be free to love and pursue the truth; I know not what *freedom* is, but to love and obey the Lord. If it were *forbidden* to love truth, to hate falsehood, to be grateful, to be kind, to follow the dictates of reason, or to live at peace with our own conscience, this would be an infringement upon liberty. If it were required of us to blaspheme the adorable name of God, or to be undutiful to him as our sovereign; this would be tyranny. It would be hard living under a government which should forbid us to love God or our neighbor. But to require what is right, and to forbid what is wrong, is no curtailment of liberty, unless, indeed, some one should wish a liberty to be an enemy of all righteousness, and a child of the devil. But this is not liberty. It is not a change from bondage to freedom, but from freedom to bondage. "Know ye not, that his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" The desires of an evil heart are now the masters of the soul that has thought it freedom to break away from the government of God. He is "*sold under sin*;" "*led captive by Satan at his will*." He is not *free* to love and obey the truth. His imperious lusts will *not allow* him to follow his own better judgment. He often struggles with his appetites, like a captive who would have liberty or death;—but they drag him along, force him into warfare with his conscience and with God, make his soul a cage for every unclean bird, and finally compel him to sacrifice honor, integrity, life, and his very salvation, to a bondage from which he shall not be free till he dies, nor while eternity endures. He is in "*the GALL of bitterness, and in the BOND of iniquity*."

We have now looked at these things sufficiently to have formed proper ideas of the nature of true freedom.

II. THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST MAKETH FREE IS TRUE FREEDOM.

He brings us under the government of law, but it is "*the perfect law of liberty*;" liberty to love man and to love God; liberty to follow the dictates of reason and of conscience; liberty to pursue our highest dignity, and our highest good; entire freedom to trample under our feet every fetter of vice, and every bond of Satan and of sin. Follow his instructions, and every veil of prejudice and error shall be removed; every delusion, every snare shall be revealed. He will teach us how to break every yoke, and how to vanquish every enemy. "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"

He will bring us into the "glorious liberty of the children of God ;" and yet the children of God are under law. Heaven itself is under law. The law that reigns there is perfect. Obedience is perfect. All disobedience is excluded. Every desire is conformed to the law. This is *true freedom* ; this is *perfect liberty*.

More particularly, the way in which the Son of God makes us free is this :—

1. *He opens the prison doors.* We were already condemned ; convicts shut up, without the possibility of escape, to be brought forth only to execution. The world was but a prison. Ascend to heaven, make our bed in hell, dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, it was impossible to flee from the presence of an offended God. It would be impossible to escape his notice amid the convulsions of the last day. The earth would melt with fervent heat ; the heavens would pass away with a great noise ; but the eye of God would be upon every guilty soul, and he could by no means escape. The pity of all created beings could not save him. No cries, no tears could dispose the Judge to reverse or abate his heavy sentence. But "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*" He came "*to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.*" Fellow, sinner, if the Son shall make *you* free, you shall be free indeed ; if not, there is no other arm that can save ; there is no other redemption for your soul.

2. *He breaks our fetters.* By his spirit, he slays the sins that have kept us in bondage. We are no longer to be led captive at the will of Satan. We are to be no longer the servants of sin. We feel that a heavy load is taken off. As a man who had been pinioned for years, feels relieved when his manacles are broken, so the soul that has been delivered from the dominion of sin feels light, and in the possession of a freedom of which it had formed no conception before.

3. *He sets us free* ; by creating in us a new heart ; and renewing in us a right spirit. Now we loathe the bondage which we loved. Now we understand the excellency of his laws ; now we love them. Now we "*hunger and thirst after righteousness.*" We feel that we shall be satisfied when we are completely renewed after the image of him who created us, and made completely holy. The laws of Christ are no restraint to us now ; we love the things which the law requires ; we abhor the things which it forbids. We want no other liberty. We should abhor ourselves if we could use any other liberty.

So Christ makes free ; not by *annulling* law ; not by *lowering*

down the demands of law ; not by *disarming* the law ; but by redeeming us from its curse ; by disposing us to love righteousness and spontaneously to pursue the path which the law requires. Our reason, our conscience, our inclination, all agree with the law. We are delivered from the misgivings, the self-condemnation, and the fears of them that are in bondage to sin. But,

4. *He admits us to the glorious franchise of the "sons of God."* "The servant abideth not in the house forever." The servant of sin is not to abide in this earthly house of God forever ; much less in that building of God eternal in the heavens. As an undutiful and wicked servant is to be turned away in disgrace and sorrow ; so the sinner is to be driven away from the presence of God. The time of retribution will come ; "and they shall gather out of his kingdom all them that offend, and them that work iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "But the Son abideth forever." They whom Christ maketh free are henceforth privilged with the franchise of *sons*. They are to abide in the house of their father. They shall go no more out. They shall receive an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Oh the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free ! Oh the eternal chains and darkness reserved for them who wear the chains of sin upon the earth ! Dying fellow sinner, wilt thou be released from bondage ? Wilt thou be delivered from condemnation ? Wilt thou be saved from everlasting captivity in an eternal prison ? Wilt thou be enfranchised with the glorious liberty of the children of God ? Christ can make you free. He died for you. He has compassion on you. Come to him : come in all your pollution ; come with all your guilt and chains upon you ; only come, repenting and believing, and you shall be set free.